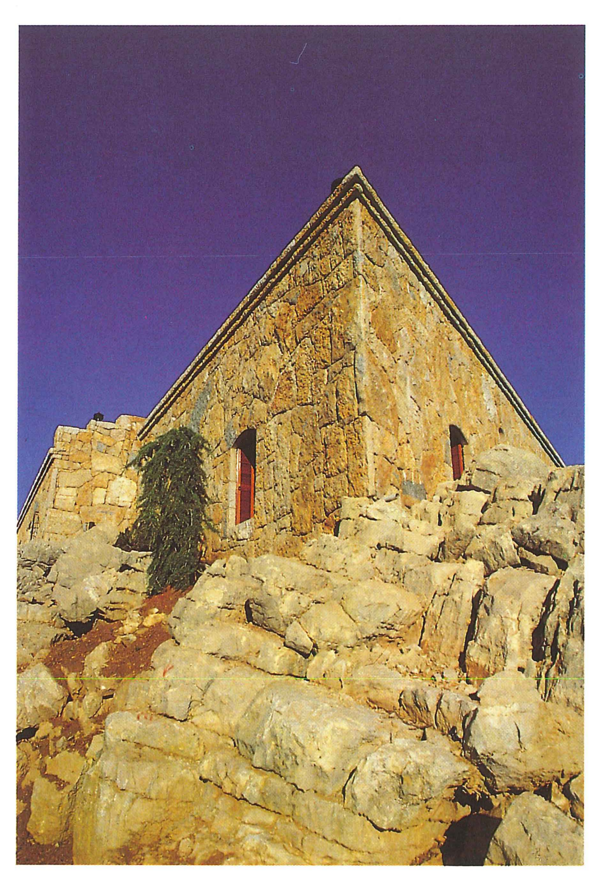
LEBANON:
A HOUSE IN THE ROCKS



The rubble stone walls nestle into the rocks from which they are built.

Project Data
Location: Faqra, Lebanon.
Architecture and Interiors: Simone Kosremelli.
Civil Engineer: Alfred Geahchan.
Mechanical Engineer: Fouad Hanna.
Electrical Engineer: Gilbert Tambourgi.
Landscaper: Renée El-Khazen.
Builder: SOLIPRO, S.A.L.
Inception: Design presented December 1984; construction began in August 1985.
Completion: November 1989.

The three aims of the project were to respect the environment; to be both sensitive to tradition and architecturally inventive; and to satisfy the client's programmatic needs.

Faqra, where the house is located, is both a ski station during the winter season and a pleasant holiday resort in summer.

The site for the residence was a triangular-shaped area of terrain with three gentle hills, beautiful rocks and a few wild trees. In keeping with the project's aim of conserving the environment, most of the wild trees were kept. We preserved the hills and used the rocks excavated between them to constitute the façades. Eventually the rocks of the façades will erode and will merge even more into the surrounding area.

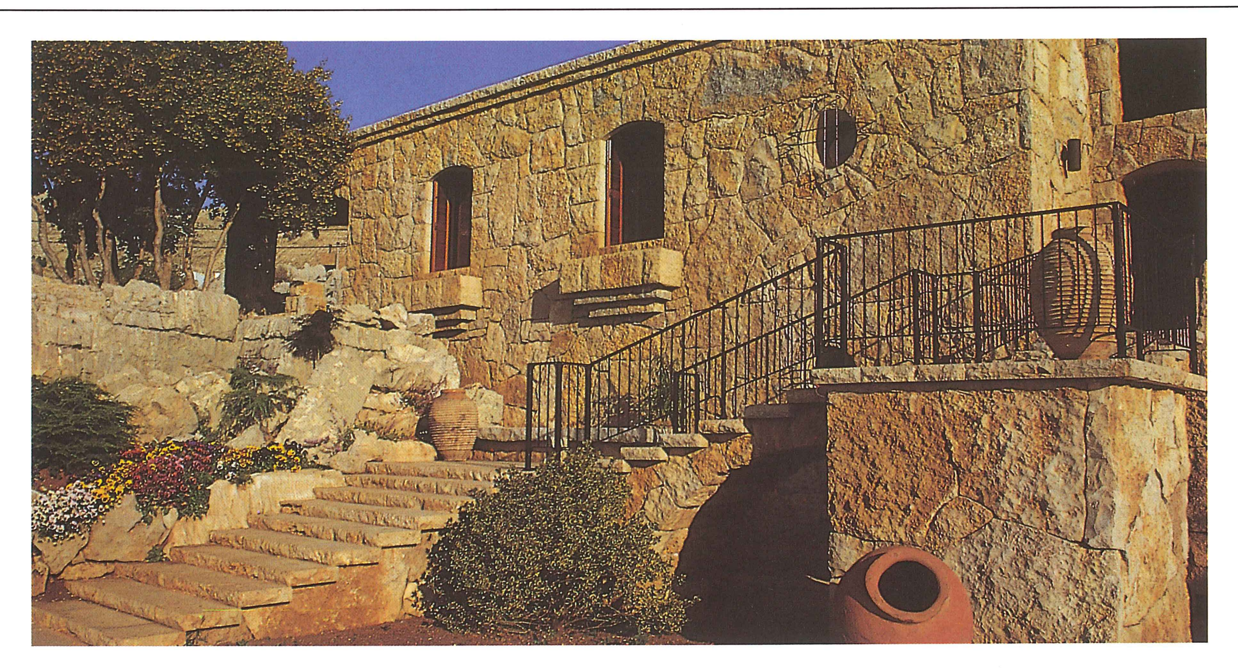
The building linked the apexes of the three hills, creating a triangular shape for the three-bedroom house. This seemed the best way to fit the building into the natural terrain.

To emphasize the close relationship between the house and its immediate surroundings, all accesses are related in some way to a striking feature of the terrain. Thus, the garage entrance is literally carved into the rock and all its interior walls are deliberately faced in stone which is treated identically to the exterior façades. The top steps of the main exterior staircase emerge from a rock formation and its bottom steps arch over the service entrance, shielding the latter from the main street. Similarly, another service access from the garage to the lower level of the garden is concealed behind one of the rocky hills. On the upper level, there is direct access from the living room to the top of the hill, where steps carved into the ground lead you down to the intermediate level of the garden, along a row of wild oak trees. From the master bedroom balcony there are steps down to the spectacular oak trees.

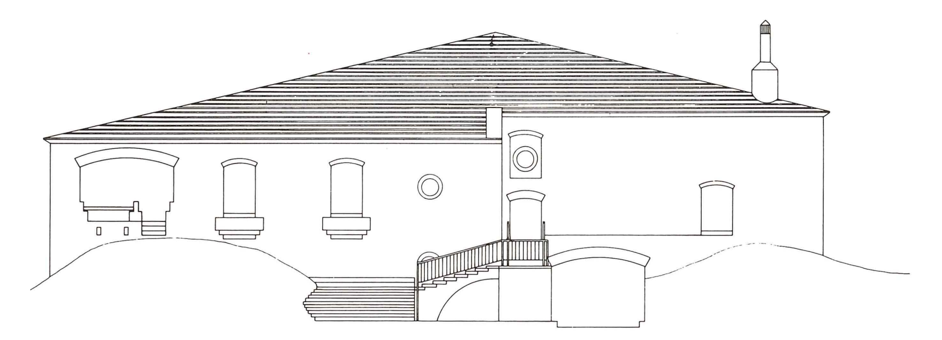
Having successfully moulded the triangular structure into the terrain, the challenge was to create an interesting succession of internal spaces.

From the parking area, two flights of stairs ascend to a buffer space that is also accessible from the main exterior staircase

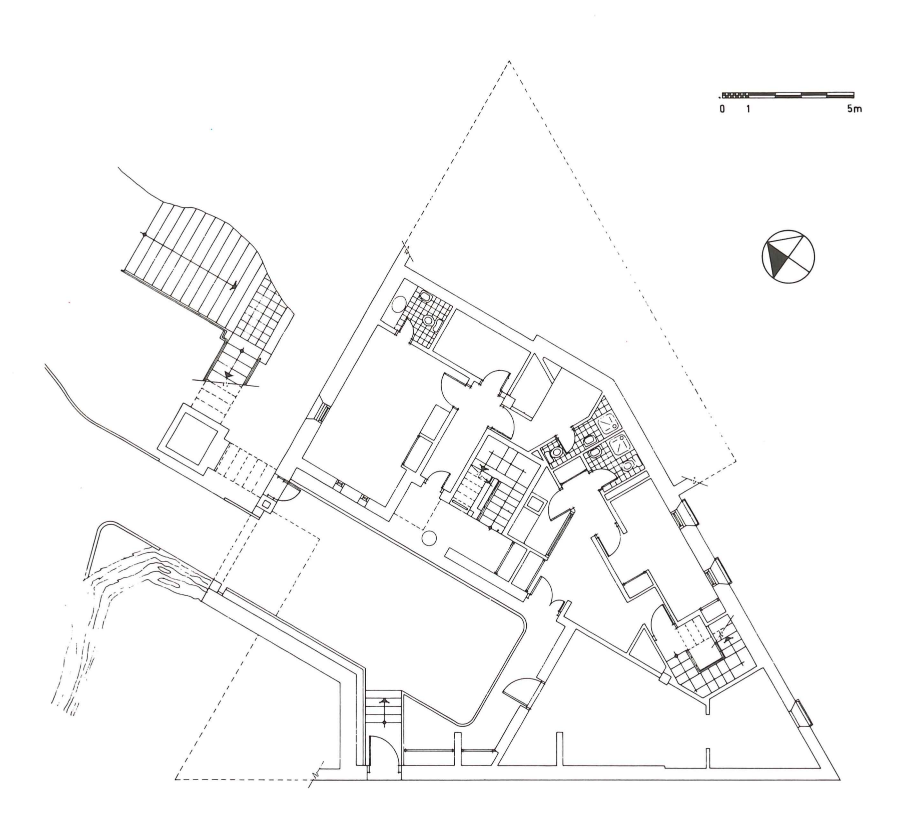
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Entrance staircase.

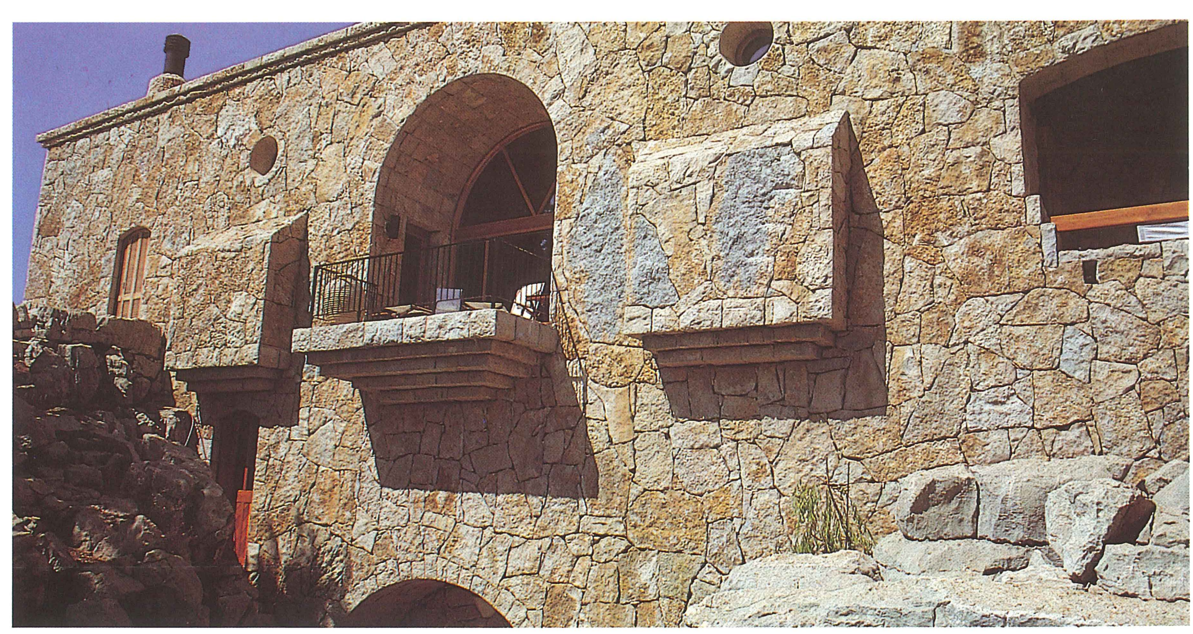


Entrance Façade.

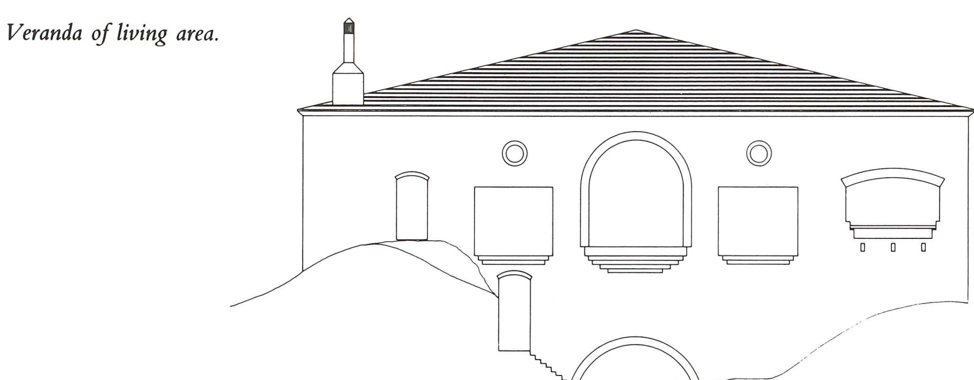


Basement Floor Plan.

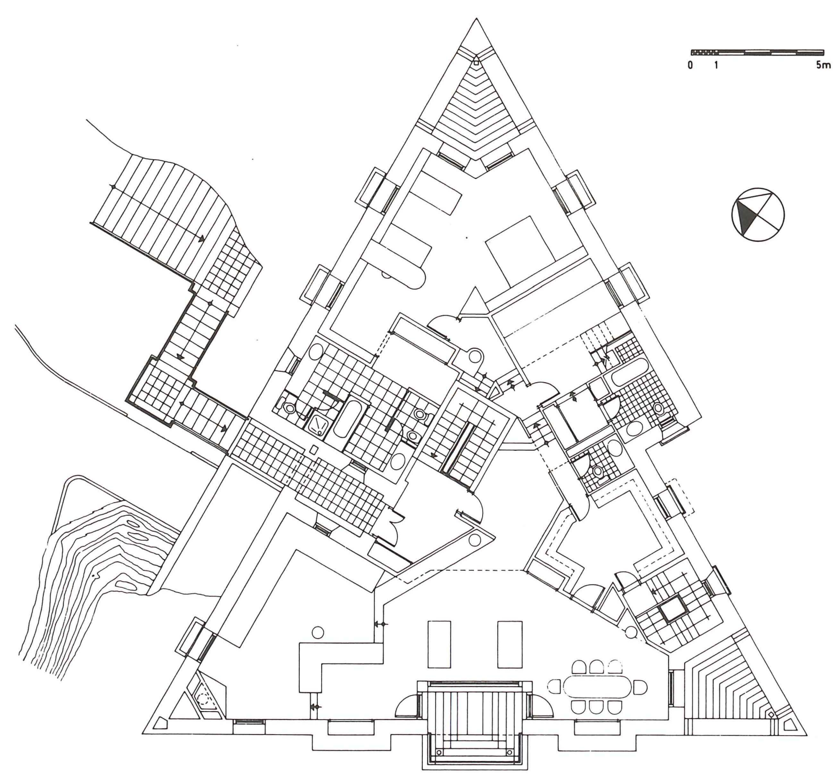
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Veranda of living area.



Living Area Façade.

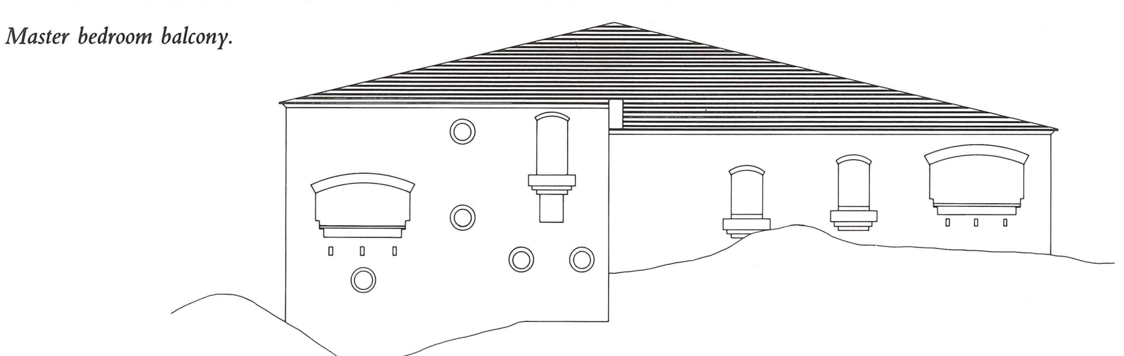


Ground Floor Plan.

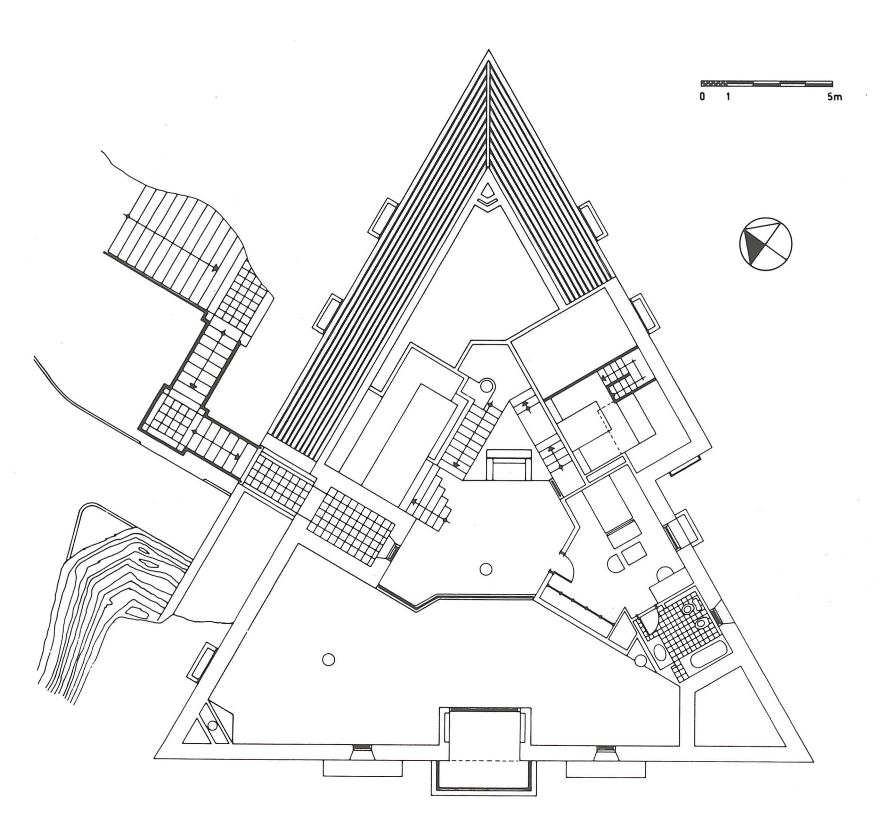
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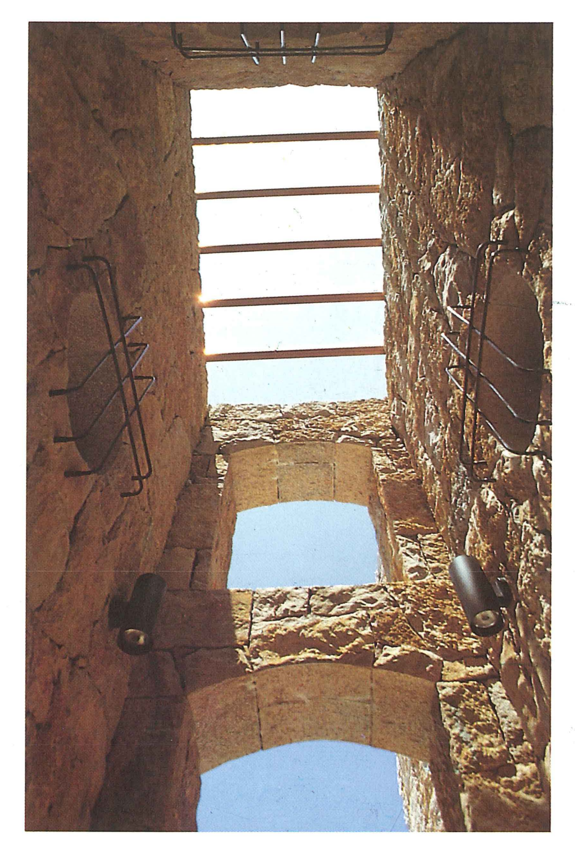
Master bedroom balcony.



Bedrooms Façade.

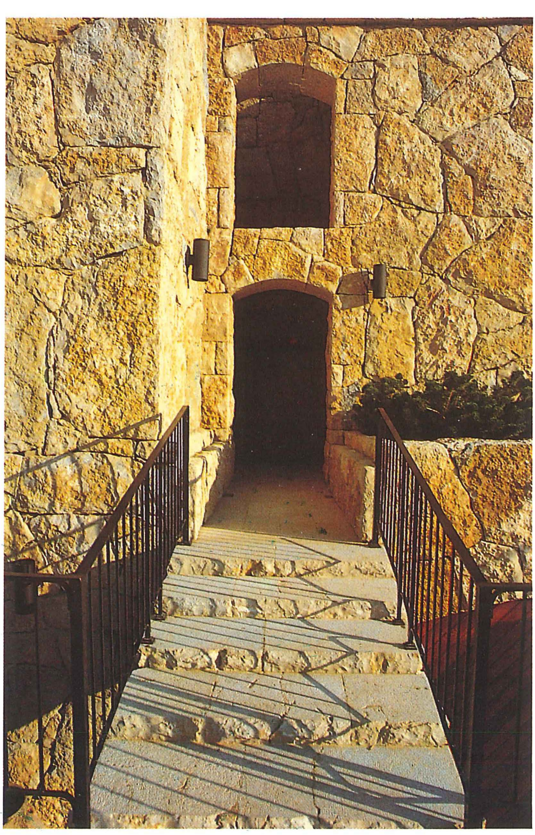


Mezzanine Floor Plan.







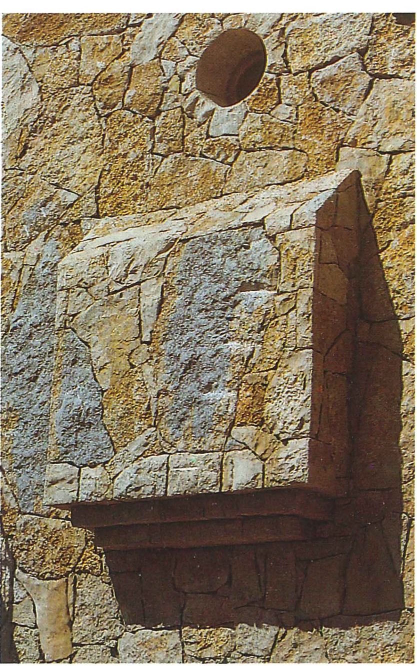


Left to right from top: Skylight over entrance; living room area from mezzanine level; central arch in living area; entrance bridge.

PROJECTS

via the sky-lit entrance loggia. This buffer zone helps reduce heat loss during the winter. The buffer zone leads to the entry that acts as a circulation distributor: to the right is the high ceiling living room facing the main barrel-vaulted arch; the living room extends to the right of this barrel vault while the dining room is located to its left. To the left of the entry is the bottom of the interior staircase, of which the first steps appear to form a sort of pedestal. After a couple of steps is the door of the first bedroom (a duplex) and the sleeping areas above. Further up is the door to the master bedroom. Finally, the last stretch of steps leads to an informal upper living area that overlooks the lower living area. This, in turn, gives a glimpse of the entrance loggia through an *oeil-de-boeuf* and offers a good view of the main garden through the upper part of the glazed barrel-vault. From this upper living room there is access to the third bedroom or the TV corner a little further up. Two of the triangular corners were used to accommodate odd-cornered balconies. The third one contains the living room fireplace.

The traditional Lebanese house consists of a cube surmounted by a pyramidal red-tiled roof; its main façade is very symmetrical and features at its centre a triple pointed arch; it is generally made out of clean-cut stone.



Top: Master bedroom: corner balcony.

Detail of buffet projection of dining room.

In this case, the inherent characteristics of the terrain caused the distortion of the traditional square into a composite triangle. In the process, the clean-cut stone-made symmetrical façades became rubble stone construction asymmetrical elongated façades. To counterbalance this effect, some elements of the vernacular architecture were used such as the red-tiled roof, the wrought iron balustrades, and the louvred wood shutters, which accentuate parts of the façades.

Structurally speaking, the perimeter of the house is a wall-bearing structure. The central structure is formed by a tall central column reaching the roof apex and a set of three round columns all 7 metres from the central one. Those three columns are differently expressed in the central area: one is semi-embedded in the dining room wall, another one articulates a change in direction in the internal staircase and the third is free-standing in the middle of the living room area.

SIMONE KOSREMELLI IS A LEBANESE ARCHITECT WHO TRAINED AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT AND COLOMBIA UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK. SHE ESTABLISHED HER OWN OFFICE IN BEIRUT IN 1979.

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